

**Speech by Hon Dr. Major Haile Gebre-Selassie at the opening ceremony of the
AU-PATTEC Advocacy Workshop, Jan 19-20, 2009**

Your Excellencies, distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am much honored to be invited today by H.E. AU Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the two- day workshop on African Trypanosomiasis Advocacy Work Plan preparation for the year 2009 and the launching of the PATTEC postage stamps. Although I am a long-distance runner and athlete, I am also very much interested in the social and economic problems of my country, Ethiopia, and also in the problems contributing to poverty and food insecurity in other African countries.

When I was child, growing up in a village in Arsi Province in the southeastern part of Ethiopia, my parents were dedicated to the keeping of livestock. My family comes from a rural background - subsistence farmers owning a variety of farm animals including cattle, sheep, goats, horses and donkeys. As children, we loved our domestic animals and grew up looking after them. We fed and milked them and tended to them in a variety of ways. Occasionally, the animals suffered from livestock diseases, and in the absence of modern veterinary services, they often died. The most common livestock disease, and probably the greatest problem in our area, was known as Gendi in the local language, or *trypanosomiasis* in Latin. This disease is transmitted by tsetse flies. Now and then, our horses and cattle succumbed to the disease. My father and the rest of us used to be very sad and at times even cried when our only source of food disappeared due to this problem. At times the whole community was and still is affected by this problem. As a child I would often wonder why there was no solution to this problem.

Some months ago, I was approached by the PATTEC Coordinator of the African Union, Dr. John Kabayo and by the FIND-PATTEC Advocacy Officer for HAT, Dr. Solomon Haile Mariam. They kindly visited me in my office and explained the objectives and missions of the African Union in connection with their eradication campaign in the various countries affected by African trypanosomiasis. I was also given some documents to read in connection with this problem. This is why I am convinced that what the African Union is doing to fight the disease will help millions of their countrymen come out of the misery caused by this fly. I was reliably informed that many African countries are now actively engaged in fighting the disease. My country Ethiopia is heavily affected by trypanosomiasis and they are trying their best to mobilize local resources, including getting loans and grants from several partners such as the African Development Bank, with the aim to eradicate this disease from parts of the country where it is found.

Your Excellencies, distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen. If there is the will and determination to solve the problem of Gendi, it is possible to find a solution. My popular slogan is "*It is Possible*". This motto helped me to win the world marathon in 1973. That is the message I want to pass to my fellow African brothers and sisters. It is possible to eradicate tsetse flies and to liberate our people from the misery they cause so long as we are determined and committed. That is why I strongly believe that the African Union is doing the right thing in this respect and would like to express my full support for the PATTEC programme. I believe that Africans will work together to get rid of the disease once and for all, and in a short time. I wish to assure you that I am with you.

Thank you.